

U . S . Department of Commerce

Northwest Regional Office

NOAA Fisheries

National Marine Fisheries Service



Questions & Answers

About the NOAA Fisheries Service 2005 Endangered Species Act Decision to Conduct a Status Review of Puget Sound Steelhead

Q. Does this decision mean that NOAA Fisheries Service is likely to list Puget Sound steelhead under the ESA?

A. Not necessarily. It means only that the agency has determined that the petition presented enough substantial scientific and commercial information to indicate that the petitioned action may be warranted.

Q. Didn't NOAA Fisheries Service already review Puget Sound steelhead?

A. Yes. In 1996, the agency conducted a comprehensive status review of coastal and inland steelhead stocks in California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. As part of this review NOAA Fisheries Service identified a Puget Sound "evolutionarily significant unit" (ESU) of coastal steelhead.

Q. What was the result of that ESA review?

A. The biological review team (BRT) concluded that the Puget Sound steelhead ESU was not in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. Informed by the BRT's findings, NOAA Fisheries Service concluded that the Puget Sound steelhead ESU did not warrant listing under the ESA, but expressed concern about the sustainability of summer steelhead populations and potentially adverse impacts from hatchery practices in Puget Sound.

Q. What happens now that NOAA Fisheries Service has accepted the petition to list Puget Sound steelhead under the ESA?

A. NOAA Fisheries Service is soliciting information on the viability of and threats to Puget Sound *O. mykiss* populations, efforts being made to protect the species, and names of potential peer reviewers. The agency is particularly interested in information that has become available since, or was otherwise not considered in the 1996 steelhead status review.

Q. What will NOAA Fisheries Service do next in this ESA petition process?

A. The agency is beginning to review the status of Puget Sound steelhead. Within 12 months of receiving the petition, by Sept. 13, 2005, NOAA Fisheries Service will make a determination on whether the petitioned action is warranted. If these steelhead are proposed for listing, that listing would become final in September 2006.

Q. Why does NOAA Fisheries Service often refer to these fish by their scientific name of *Oncorhynchus mykiss*?

A. Biologists say that the species known popularly as steelhead has the most complex life history of any Pacific salmon. If it remains a permanent freshwater resident, never traveling to the ocean, it's known as a rainbow trout. If it migrates to saltwater, it's called a steelhead, but it can spend up to seven years in fresh water before its trip to the Pacific, where it can remain for three years. Unlike most other salmon, it can spawn more than once. The offspring of steelhead can be rainbow trout; the offspring of rainbows can be steelhead. Using the scientific name, which is often abbreviated to *O. mykiss*, covers all potential lifeforms of this type of salmon.